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**Is More Violent Better? The Impact of Group Participation in Violence on Group  
Longevity for Far-Right Extremist Groups**

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**Abstract**

Recent research has begun to explore the causes of organizational death for domestic far-right extremist groups. An important aspect that has not been examined is whether or not a group's participation in violence influences its longevity. This study addresses this gap in the literature by examining over 400 domestic far-right extremist groups that persisted for varying lengths of time to determine whether or not group participation in violence influences their longevity. Additionally, this study also examines whether a variety of external (environmental) and internal correlates influence the longevity of violent and non-violent groups differently.

Most terrorist and extremist groups usually organize, exist, and ultimately die in less than a year.<sup>1</sup> Few studies investigate why some groups persist and others do not, but recent scholarship has begun to explore this question. These studies explored the external and internal correlates that may influence whether groups live or die after existing for at least three years; and also compared the differences between long- (+ 3 years) and short-lasting (- 3 years) groups.<sup>2</sup> This research provides a good starting point for studying the organizational death of far-right extremist groups and helps to explain why some groups persist and others die young.

However, one aspect of the far-right movement that research has not yet addressed is group involvement in violence. Chermak, Freilich, and Suttmoeller identify differences between violent and non-violent groups, but do not examine how those differences influence group longevity.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this study builds upon previous research by examining whether external and internal correlates of organizational death differ for violent and non-violent groups. More specifically, this paper explores whether and how far-right groups' participation in violence influences their longevity.

Investigating how group participation in violence influences group longevity is important for several reasons. First, thousands of far-right extremist groups have existed in the United States throughout history. Many of these groups are short-lived, but others such as the Ku Klux Klan have persisted for decades.<sup>4</sup> Few studies examine why some domestic far-right groups survive, while others die. Recently, scholars have begun to examine the correlates of organizational death for the domestic far right, but they have mostly investigated correlates of an

organization's demise. This study builds upon this previous work and examines how violence influences group longevity.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the domestic far-right poses a serious threat to society, as the shootings of law enforcement officers in Las Vegas<sup>6</sup> and at a Jewish Community Center in Kansas City demonstrate.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) identified 892 active extremist groups in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, the SPLC identified at least 6,000 far-right groups that have operated or are operating in the United States since 1990.<sup>9</sup> Even though only a small percentage of those groups committed violent acts, the influence of social movement organizations may extend beyond their particular group's membership, and may influence unaffiliated, but like-minded others to commit acts of deviance or violence.<sup>10</sup> For example, Green and Rich found that cross burnings increased in areas where white supremacist rallies were recently held.<sup>11</sup>

Further exemplifying the threat the far-right poses is its willingness to attack law enforcement and other government officials to further its anti-government views.<sup>12</sup> When coupled with the belief in conspiracy theories that contend the government is unlawfully watching activists, far-rightists may be extremely unpredictable and violent when interacting with law enforcement.<sup>13</sup> The sovereign citizen shootings of deputies in LaPlace, Louisiana in 2012 exemplify the threat the far-right poses to law enforcement.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, law enforcement officials in the United States identify the far-right as a substantial threat to their respective states. State police agencies view far-right extremists as nearly as large a threat to national and state security as jihadists.<sup>15</sup> The ECDB corroborates those sentiments by linking 335

homicide incidents to 100 domestic far-right organizations between 1990 and 2010. These homicides resulted in over 560 individuals killed.<sup>16</sup>

Third, this study includes both violent and non-violent groups. Prior to Suttmoeller et al.,<sup>15</sup> scholars focused only on the activities of violent extremist groups. Researchers have typically focused solely on violent groups, but the vast majority of such groups are non-violent (some research indicates as many as 85%).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Simi's work on the far right shows that extremists often are involved in non-violent movement activities and groups prior to turning to violence.<sup>17</sup> To gain a more complete understanding of the groups that comprise the domestic far-right movement, as well as the overall domestic far-right movement, we studied both violent and non-violent groups. Further, by comparing the correlates of organizational death for violent and non-violent groups, we can generate a better understanding of why such groups survive.

## **Literature Review**

Organizations are born, mature, and die.<sup>18</sup> Roughly 50% of businesses in the United States die within the first five years of their existence, and most businesses die within 10 years.<sup>19</sup> Over 90% of domestic far-right groups also die quickly.<sup>20</sup> Of the few that do survive past the first year, approximately half of those die within 10 years.<sup>21</sup> Chermak et al. found an even smaller percentage (~10%) survived longer than three years.<sup>22</sup>

## **Terrorist Group Death**

Scholars agree that both external and internal factors may influence the life span of an organization.<sup>23</sup> The literature review below highlights the potential influence of these factors.

Murphy and Meyers identified the following external correlates: economics, competition, technology, legal and government restraints, social change, and political vulnerability as possible factors in an organizations decline and death.<sup>24</sup> Internal correlates such as: group age, group size, internal conflict and group ideology have also been identified as possible factors in a group's decline and demise.

### **External causes.**

#### ***Economics.***

Historically, white supremacist groups exploited economic issues to increase recruitment and to mobilize supporters.<sup>25</sup> However, no one has examined how different economic environments impact far-right groups. Abel, Gabe and Stolarick have examined economics relative to whether an organization was located in an urban, suburban, or rural environment. Urban, suburban, and rural environments differ economically. Urban areas are characterized by larger numbers of white collar occupations, while rural areas have higher numbers of blue collar jobs.<sup>26</sup> It is important to make this distinction between urban and rural environments because both Smith and Florida's studies suggest that most extremist groups were concentrated in rural environments.<sup>27</sup> Further, most domestic right-wing extremist groups leaders are employed in middle and lower middle class occupations.<sup>28</sup> Conversely, Ross reports that urban environments are more conducive to terrorist activities and that more domestic extremist groups are located in these environments.<sup>29</sup>

Poverty is another economic variable that could influence group longevity. Gilliard-Matthews found that the percentage of people living in poverty influences the ability of some

white supremacist groups to mobilize and organize.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Florida found that hate groups were concentrated in areas with higher poverty rates.<sup>31</sup> If higher poverty rates increase a group's ability to recruit and mobilize, then they may also have the opposite effect in areas with lower poverty rates.

### *Competition.*

Competition for resources between groups may also influence a group's longevity. Competition can be operationalized as a measure of the number of organizations that are operating in a given area or the organizational density in a certain environment. As organizational density increases, the competition between organizations for resources and recruits intensifies and may lead to higher mortality rates among young groups<sup>32</sup> as well as the elimination and death of some other organizations in a highly competitive environment.<sup>33</sup> Crenshaw et al. examine organizational density and its impact on terrorist group mortality. They found a curvilinear relationship in that a higher organizational density in a given area decreases an organization's chances of survival to a certain point and then increases its chances. They believe this relationship it may be due to cooperation between groups.<sup>34</sup>

Further, Kaplan found that even though some far-right extremists may maintain several group affiliations, extremists can only dedicate time and energy to a limited number of organizations, thereby increasing the competition between groups for the time and energy resources of members.<sup>35</sup> This particular variable may have increased significance in the current study. Oots found that in an effort to out-compete their rivals and increase recruitment, terrorist

organizations may turn to violence. However this strategy may backfire and actually erode public confidence and support for the organization, which may lead to its decline and demise.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Technology.*

The adoption or rejection of new technology may also influence a group's decline or demise.<sup>37</sup> Existing or established organizations may have difficulty adapting to new technological advances which in turn may lead to their decline. During this period of decline, newer and younger organizations that use these new technologies may outcompete the older, declining organizations.<sup>38</sup> The inability of some organizations to embrace innovative and advancing technology may have particular relevance to the current study. During the study period, the use of computers and the Internet was an important advancement in the use of technology for these extremist groups.

The Internet can provide important advantages to groups that choose to use it. The Internet could aid an organization's ability to fundraise, network, recruit, publicize its propaganda and psychological warfare campaigns, and gather and share information.<sup>39</sup> Groups that do not use the Internet may be at a disadvantage to those that do.

#### *Legal and government restraints.*

The organizational literature defines legal and government restraints as government intervention and regulation of traditional businesses.<sup>40</sup> Under this definition, all levels of government influence organizations and the types of relationships and transactions in which organizations may participate.<sup>41</sup> This type of government intervention may not be directly



applicable to extremist groups, but it could constrain these organizations through police or military intervention that then causes the group's death.<sup>42</sup> Jones and Libicki found that 47% of groups ended due to military or police involvement.<sup>43</sup> While military intervention is generally not used to counter extremism in the United States, policing may be an effective means of government intervention. This is particularly relevant to this study's focus on domestic groups that are often local and known to the police. This variable may also have increased significance for the current study. Violent groups may be more prone to police involvement due to their violent acts, which may influence whether or not they live or die.

### *Social change.*

Changes in the social environment may also lead to organizational failure.<sup>44</sup> If businesses or organizations do not realize lifestyle or racial and ethnic shifts within society, they may be more prone to failure.<sup>45</sup> The shifts may decrease demand for a particular organization's goods or services, and if these changes are not recognized by the organization, the organization may decline or die.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, changes in the social environment may impact the demand for an extremist group's "goods" or "services." This change in demand could impact a far-right group because it may be directly tied to society's tolerance of its existence. Also, because of the racial component of the far-right, differences in societal demographics may also influence these groups.<sup>47</sup> Changes in societal acceptance of groups may be important for this particular study. If a group commits a violent act, society's support or tolerance of that group may wane, which may influence its longevity. Conversely, if the community supports the group's violent act, they may benefit from increased public support, which could also influence its longevity.

A social variable that may influence the longevity of domestic far-right extremist groups is the racial heterogeneity of the states in which the group is located. While researchers have only tested this measure with regard to terrorist or extremist group death or failure;<sup>48</sup> researchers have used measures of cultural diversity in other studies of the far-right.<sup>49</sup> The more racially heterogeneous an area, the more likely that a white supremacist or extremist will encounter a minority who does not adhere to his or her worldview. These encounters can lead whites to believe their place in society is threatened, and may increase their animosity toward minorities if the encounters are unpleasant. Feelings of animosity or of being threatened may increase a racial group's ability to recruit and organize in a particular area, which may impact group longevity.<sup>50</sup>

***Political vulnerability.***

Political stability is important to organizational survival. A stable political environment allows organizations to plan for the future, while an unstable environment creates uncertainty because organizations are unsure about the future.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, political context may also influence the longevity of social movement organizations and extremist organizations. Unstable political environments may contribute to a group's ability to mobilize.<sup>52</sup>

Electoral instability can be a sign of political instability caused by changes in political alignments. Shifting political alignments based on election results, may certainly influence social movement organizations. Groups that experience a loss of political power, government oppression or the perceived loss of political power may mobilize in an effort to regain lost power or to fight back against those that have gained power.<sup>53</sup> The political party system's configuration may also effect social movement organizations. Kreisi discusses the left side of the

political spectrum and believes a political party will encourage and attempt to adopt portions of social movement organizations that may benefit them politically, which may lead to increased political support for the organization.<sup>54</sup>

The political environment can be assessed through measures of ideology and representation. The state government's ideology can influence whether white supremacist groups are able to mobilize. Government ideology is a measure of the political leaders of each state based on roll-call voting scores, congressional election outcomes, the partisan division of the state legislatures, the governor's party and other political assumptions.<sup>55</sup>

Political representation may also influence the presence and mobilization of white supremacist groups in the United States. Gilliard-Matthews measures political representation two ways: by presidential election results and by the state governor's party affiliation. She found that political representation is related to the presence of some groups.<sup>56</sup>

The prior discussion focuses on the mobilization and presence of social movement organizations and extremist groups. Oots suggested that the same factors associated with a terrorist group's formation may be related to the group's death.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, examining the political context at the state level may influence whether a domestic far-right extremist group persists or fails.

### **Internal causes.**

Internal causes may also play a role in an organizations' longevity. Internal issues are responsible for more organizational failures (possibly up to 80%) than are external factors.<sup>58</sup>

Internal causes of organizational death are important to the current study because much of the focus is on extremist groups and their internal dynamics. Specifically, age, size, internal conflict, and group ideology are important to understanding the death of extremist groups.

*Organizational age and size.*

Prior research is unclear as to whether organizational age influences a group's longevity. Stinchcombe's seminal work argues that younger organizations are more likely to fail than older organizations. He refers to this as a "liability of newness."<sup>59</sup> Stinchcombe argues that new organizations lack stable relationships among members and are still learning and creating their roles and tasks, and therefore are susceptible to failure.<sup>60</sup>

Whether organizational size influences a terrorist organization's mortality has also produced mixed results. Jones and Libicki believe that larger groups outcompete smaller groups due to their available resources and the greater difficulty of government factionalization.<sup>61</sup> Others believe that large size decreases a group's ability to maintain social cohesion.<sup>62</sup> Further complicating the matter is that group size may simply be the result of persisting for an extended period of time, and not actually related to group longevity.<sup>63</sup>

Even though scholars cannot agree on whether a large group size influences a group's longevity, they do agree that a loss of members can lead to the death of a terrorist organization. Terrorist groups may meet their demise through the loss of members due to amnesty,<sup>64</sup> death, imprisonment, or disenchantment.<sup>65</sup>

*Instability.*

Instability within the organization is another internal characteristic that may influence a group's longevity.<sup>66</sup> Instability is defined as a loss of personnel or turnover, or infighting.<sup>67</sup> For purposes of this discussion, in-fighting among members<sup>68</sup> and factional splitting<sup>69</sup> are combined as a measure of instability.

In-fighting can be the result of competition or disagreements. Infighting due to competition may occur when group members vie for leadership positions.<sup>70</sup> Infighting can also occur due to disagreements about the group's operations, style, assets, or the speed with which the group is escalating its activities. An example of a group operation that may cause discord among group members is whether the group uses violence as a tactic.<sup>71</sup> Terrorist organizations are commonly factionalized. As groups increase in size, the ability to maintain internal cohesiveness becomes more difficult. When the amount of dissent within the organization becomes great enough, factionalization, competition, and internal struggles for leadership may occur. When factionalism occurs within the group, the larger group may collapse and divide into smaller groups, which may or may not become functioning terrorist organizations. Competition within the group as well as internal leadership struggles may also cause factionalization that results in the organization's demise.<sup>72</sup> This variable may have increased significance for the current study. Violent groups may possibly be more prone to in-fighting due to their choice to commit violence, while non-violent groups may still suffer from infighting, the choice of whether or not to commit violence may not be as common a cause as it is for violent groups.

*Group ideology.*

Group ideology is another internal characteristic that may influence a group's longevity. Within the terrorism literature, groups that adhere to a nationalist or religious ideology seem to last longer than those that do not.<sup>73</sup> Religious groups are thought to persist for longer durations because spiritually based motivations are not easily abandoned.<sup>74</sup> Jones and Libicki's innovative empirical test of whether a group's ideology influences its longevity found that religious groups lasted longer than all other types of organizations across all four time periods they examined.<sup>75</sup>

The far-right movement is actually characterized by several ideological disagreements, as the Southern Poverty Law Center's categories exemplify (SPLC).<sup>76</sup> These typologies include categories such as Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, Christian Identity, and Neo-Confederate. These typologies suffer from over generalization, while also focusing on distinct organizations and subcultures. Further, these typologies are such that some groups could be included in multiple typologies, while others do not match any of the categories and are classified as "other."<sup>77</sup> Other typologies are also problematic for similar reasons.<sup>78</sup>

Berlet and Vysotsky and Vysotsky<sup>79</sup> propose a broader and more inclusive typological system for white supremacist groups based on Kreisi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Guigni's New Social Movements typology.<sup>80</sup> This typology is based upon ideology and organizational activity and includes three broad categories: political, religious, and youth cultural organizations. Berlet and Vysotsky believe these categories capture all white supremacist groups. Because these categories are broad, Dobratz suggests researchers can also create subcategories.<sup>81</sup> Even though Berlet and Vysotsky originally developed these categories for white supremacist groups, the

categories may apply to a broader sample of domestic far-right groups because of their inclusivity.

The groups within the political typology share several key elements and are rooted in neo-fascist or Neo-Nazi ideologies. These groups are generally authoritarian and appeal to traditional values to develop narrow and discriminatory definitions of nation, race and citizenship to create an “other” class of enemies. These types of groups also promote a revolutionary ideology against the dominant political structure of the United States government.<sup>82</sup> Political groups also participate in activities such as information dissemination, rallies, protests, and meetings. These events intimidate and heighten tensions with existing out groups and increase support by attracting sympathetic individuals from the community. Examples of political groups are: National Alliance, White Aryan Resistance, National Socialist Movement, White Revolution, Volksfront, and National Vanguard.<sup>83</sup>

Religious groups are not only led by a spiritually driven ideology, their members also practice this religion’s beliefs.<sup>84</sup> White supremacist religions provide adherents with the inspiration for their racial beliefs and for their role in the broader world. While these groups may also participate in activities similar to political groups, they also participate in religious services, study sacred texts, and have special rituals and ceremonies.<sup>85</sup> Examples of religious sects within this category are: Christian Identity, Creativity, Odinism, Asatru, and Wotanism.

The final category is youth cultural groups that comprise a substantial portion of the White Supremacist movement.<sup>86</sup> While these groups may adhere to a broad white supremacist

ideology, they vary in their specific beliefs and include subcategories such as skinheads, black metal, and industrial/noise/apocalyptic folk/gothic.<sup>87</sup>

While correlates of organizational death have not been studied for the domestic far-right based on ideological typologies, it may be an important aspect that deserves examination. It also may be especially relevant in this particular study because skinhead groups commonly adhere to a youth cultural ideology and are known to be violent.<sup>88</sup> Because of the aforementioned problems with most of the presented typologies, this study uses Berlet and Vysotsky's typology due to its broad nature and exclusivity of the categories.<sup>89</sup>

### **Violent vs. Nonviolent Groups**

Few prior studies examine differences between violent and non-violent groups. This is an important oversight because the vast majority of far-right groups are non-violent, but there has been little research documenting the characteristics of such groups and deciphering whether they are similar or different from violent organizations. Obviously, one main difference is whether group members choose to commit ideologically motivated violence. Chermak et al. found some significant differences between groups that participated in ideological violence, and those that did not. Specifically, groups that were larger, older, purposefully recruited youth, and advocated for leaderless resistance were more likely to have their members commit ideologically motivated violence.<sup>90</sup> While these findings are interesting, no one has addressed whether or not the reasons for organizational death differ between violent and non-violent groups.

However, some of Chermak et al.'s findings may inform this current study. Their study suggests that violent organizations are more likely to be larger organizations. Other terrorism



research found that larger organizations tend to persist for longer periods of time than smaller organizations. Further, if groups are specifically recruiting youth members, this may speak to the group's ideology which may also influence whether or not a group survives.<sup>91</sup> They also found that groups that advocated for leaderless resistance were more likely to be violent. Finally, police intervention may play a role in whether violence influences a group's longevity. Suttmoeller et al. examined police interventions against groups that survived for more than three years and found that police intervention did not significantly influence organizational death.<sup>92</sup> However, when longer lived groups were combined with those that survived less than three years, police intervention was found to be negatively related to groups dying young.<sup>93</sup> Notably, neither of these articles examines police intervention relative to group participation in violence. We assume though that the police would commonly intervene against groups that participate in ideological violence. Therefore, it is unknown if it is a substantial factor in whether or not a violent group lives or dies. If a violent group is large, as the research suggests, then it may be able to absorb some losses of group members to police intervention as a result of its violent behavior.

### **Summary of Hypotheses**

**H<sub>1</sub>: Group participation in violence will be negatively related to group longevity for both long and short lived groups.**

**H<sub>2</sub>: External correlates will be significantly more important than internal correlates for the longevity of violent groups. The groups will face external pressures as a result of participation in violence.**

**H<sub>3</sub>: Internal correlates will be significantly more important than external correlates for the longevity of non-violent groups. These groups will be less likely to be pressured from external pressures and will be more focused on group stability.**

### **Data and Methods**

We use data from the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). The ECDB is an open source, relational database that contains, in addition to far-right group data, data on violent incidents, financial crimes, foiled domestic extremist plots, and far right hate groups.<sup>94</sup>

The ECDB includes groups identified from the SPLC's annual *Intelligence Report* and *Klanwatch* publications from 1990-2008. All domestic far-right groups that existed during this time frame were included in the original compilation of 6,000 groups. The groups were then separated into two categories, those that survived more than three years and those that did not. 550 of the 6,000 groups persisted for more than three years. We randomly selected 275 groups from the ECDB's 550 groups that had persisted for three years or longer.<sup>95</sup> We used a random sample of groups, rather than the entire population because we did not have the resources available to collect data for all 550 groups, and by using random sampling, we were able to select a representative sample of groups that persisted for longer than three years. Most of these organizations consisted of only a single chapter, but some had multiple chapters. In the event that an organization consisted of multiple chapters, we created an umbrella group. For example, the SPLC identifies 24 chapters of the World Church of the Creator, but we created only one entry for the World Church of the Creator for the ECDB. We randomly sampled groups that did not persist for three years (N=135) from the remaining 5,450 groups in the original ECDB list.<sup>96</sup>

We collected data for all of the groups according to the ECDB open source search protocol. The ECDB protocol is based on 26 different search engines such as Google, New Library, Lexis-Nexis, Infotrac, and All the Web to uncover all publicly available information for each group and its members.<sup>97</sup> The initial search consisted of the group's name, but as we found additional information, we conducted subsequent searches until all leads were exhausted. In the event that we could find no information for a particular group, we randomly selected a replacement group from the list. We then substituted the random group for the original group, and searched according to the open source protocol. Even though the SPLC initially identified all groups, we independently verified each organization's existence to ensure our study's validity. In other words, for a group to be included, we had to find evidence of its existence, independent of the SPLC. In the event we could not verify a group's existence, we replaced the group. Ultimately, we replaced 31 groups because we found no independent information verifying their existence.<sup>98</sup>

## **Coding**

### **Correlates of organizational death.**

#### ***Dependent variable.***

This study uses two measures of group death. The first is a dichotomous measure of whether a group died (did not die/died). We use this variable for analyses that only include groups that survived longer than three years. This is consistent with previous research<sup>99</sup> that examines correlates of organizational death, but does not examine the role of violence. The second is a dichotomous measure of whether a group died prior to reaching three years of age:

group died prior to three years of age (did not die prior to three years of age/died prior to three years of age).<sup>100</sup> We use this variable for analyses that include the entire sample of groups. This measure is also consistent with previous research, but this research has yet to examine the role of violence.<sup>101</sup> It was important to use both measures of organizational death to fill gaps in the current literature regarding both groups that persisted for an extended length of time and also the differences between groups that persisted for an extended period of time and those that died quickly.

We determined whether a group died, or died prior to reaching three years of age, by either explicit information gleaned from open sources that indicated the group died, or if the group disappeared from the open sources. Once a group no longer appeared in open sources, we considered it defunct when it did not appear for five consecutive years. The five year waiting period was consistent with other organizational studies.<sup>102</sup>

#### ***Independent variables.***

##### *External variables.*

Consistent with the key factors that previous literature identifies, we examined several external factors for this study. We studied two economic factors. The first was a dichotomous variable of whether the group was located in an urban county.<sup>103</sup> We identified the type of county based on the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes. We used the 1993 code for groups that existed only in the 1990s and the 2003 code for groups that existed after 2000. We coded "urban" groups based on the USDA code as "1." We coded all other groups as "0."

The second economic factor is a continuous measure that captures the percentage of people living in poverty for the county where the group was located. We gathered the poverty measure for the years 1990 and 2000 from the United States Census. We used the 1990 measure for those groups that existed only in the 1990s. We used the 2000 measure for groups that survived after 2000.

The next external factor was a competition measure. This measure was a continuous variable that captures the average number of extremist groups within the state where the group of interest was located.<sup>104</sup> We compiled the number of groups that existed in each state for each year from the yearly listing of extremist groups in the SPLC's *Intelligence Report*.

The study also includes the group's use of technology as another external factor. This variable is a dichotomous measure of whether the group used the Internet (used the Internet/did not use the Internet) and we coded it based on open source materials. If any evidence was found that the group used the Internet for any purpose, it was coded as a group that used the Internet.

The next external factor was a measure of government and legal restraints. This variable was a dichotomous measure of whether police intervention impacted the group (did not have a police intervention/did have a police intervention), and we coded it based on open sources.

A measure of social change was the next external factor and it was a continuous measure of the percentage of racial heterogeneity for the county where the group was located. This information was also drawn from the United States Census data and followed the same coding procedure as the poverty measure.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, we captured political vulnerability with two variables. The first was a continuous measure of state government ideology as measured by Berry et al. and Gilliard-Matthews.<sup>106</sup> We gathered this data was from the Richard C. Fording Dataverse and included state government ideology scores from 1960 through 2006. Because the scores are available for every year, we used the average score for all the years a group existed. These scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating increased liberalism.<sup>107</sup> Because there is no extreme variation in a state's government ideology from year to year, we estimated years 2007 and 2008 based on the last year that a measure was available (2006).<sup>108</sup>

The other political measure was a categorical variable that captured the presidential voting history for each state that had an extremist group.<sup>109</sup> We coded this variable to indicate whether the state where the group was located was a blue or red state in presidential elections. Suttmoeller et al. coded groups that survived for three years or longer as either “red,” “blue,” or “purple.” If a group only persisted during the term of one president, we coded it simply as either “red” or “blue.” If a group persisted into two or more presidential terms, we could have also coded the variable as a “purple state.” We classified a state as “purple” if that state's voters supported a presidential candidate from one political party in one election and a candidate from a different political party in the next election.<sup>110</sup> However, for this analysis, because none of the groups that failed to survive for three years was located in a “purple” state, we only coded groups as to whether they were located in “red” or “blue” states.

The descriptive statistics for the continuous variables are fairly consistent across the group samples. These statistics included both groups that lived and those that died. Table 1

shows the descriptives. Small differences exist, but we found no extreme values that might skew the results for any of the group samples. Within each sample of groups, the Government Ideology measure appears to exhibit quite a bit of variation, which means that groups are distributed in both liberal and conservative states. The Group Density measure is fairly interesting. It ranges from an average of approximately one group to 58 groups, with a mean of roughly 16 for each sample of groups. This shows that group densities vary quite a bit from state to state. Some states do not have much of a far-right presence and some states have a fairly extensive far-right presence. However, on average, states typically house approximately 16 groups.

The descriptive statistics for all the samples of groups are fairly consistent. Table 2 shows these statistics. However, two variables do exhibit some variation. A lack of police intervention is much higher for non-violent groups than for violent groups, regardless if they persisted for more than three years or less than three years. This makes complete sense. If groups are participating in violent activities, they should be more likely to have experienced police intervention.

The second variable that exhibits quite a bit of variation is Internet use by groups that did not persist for three years. Since these groups did not persist for very long, they may have either not had an Internet presence, or they may have had a short-lived Internet presence not captured in open sources. Interestingly, it seems that establishing a web presence would be a fairly easy step to take, especially with the potential recruiting and fundraising it could bring.<sup>111</sup> Interestingly, approximately 10% more non-violent groups that persisted for less than three years

used the Internet than did violent groups. It appears that groups that were prone to commit violent attacks may have chosen to plan and carry out an attack in lieu of creating an online presence to assist with recruiting and fundraising.

The variable that measured whether a group lost public support did not exhibit much variation. It was difficult to capture this variable, and we subsequently dropped it from analyses.

*Internal variables.*

Internal factors may also play a role in the death of a right-wing extremist group. The first internal variable was a dichotomous measure that captures whether the organization suffered from factional splitting.<sup>112</sup> The second internal factor was group ideology and it used Berlet and Vysotsky's categorical measure and captured whether a group was (1) political, (2) religious, or (3) youth cultural.<sup>113</sup> When we included this variable in the analysis, we dummy coded each category with youth cultural serving as the reference category. The final internal variable captured whether or not the group suffered personnel losses (other than leaders) due to amnesty, death, imprisonment, or disenchantment.<sup>114</sup> This was a dichotomous variable (0/1). We coded all of these internal variables based on open sources.

Political ideology exhibits a fair amount of variation among the sets of groups. The sample of groups that did not persist for three years had a higher percentage of groups that adhered to a youth cultural ideology. This finding was expected. Skinhead groups often adhere to this type of ideology.<sup>115</sup>



More interesting are the differences between the two sets of violent groups. Violent groups that survived less than three years had a much higher percentage of youth cultural groups than did the set of violent groups that survived for more than three years. Unsurprisingly, skinhead groups comprised such a large percentage of violent groups that survived less than three years because skinhead groups are notoriously volatile and appear and disappear with some frequency.<sup>116</sup> However, the much lower percentage of youth cultural groups in the sample of older groups suggests that political and religious groups may be more likely to participate in violence as they age and develop organizational capacity, rather than shortly after founding.<sup>117</sup> Further, the sample of groups that did not persist for three years also had a lower percentage of religious groups. Religious groups generally survive longer than other types of groups due to the dedication of followers.<sup>118</sup> If members are dedicated to a group and its religious ideology, these groups may tend not to die as quickly as others. Table 3 presents the full descriptive statistics for the internal variables.

### *Violence*

We operationalized violence in several different ways. First, violence was coded as a dichotomous measure of whether or not a group member participated in violence. We included this dichotomous measure as an internal organizational characteristic. Second, we included a dichotomous measure of repeat violence. Blomberg et al. and Chermak et al. suggest that differences may exist between groups that commit a single act of violence and groups that commit multiple acts of violence.<sup>119</sup> Twenty-eight of the groups committed multiple acts of violence.

The second way we operationalized group violence was by examining violent groups separately from non-violent groups. We examined each of the internal and external correlates (except for group participation in violence) for both violent groups and non-violent groups to determine whether violent groups were influenced differently by the external and internal correlates than were non-violent groups.

## **Results**

### **Violence.**

Since we include both violent and non-violent groups, determining whether or not group participation in violence influences whether or not a group lives or dies is important. By participating in violence, groups potentially expose themselves to an increased risk of police intervention, loss of public support, and loss of group members to death and imprisonment. Further, prior research notes that increased organizational capacity increases the chances that a group participated in violence. Organizational capacity increases as groups become better organized, age, and grow larger.<sup>120</sup>

### **Group Violence.**

This study includes both violent and non-violent groups that existed for varying lengths of time. This model tested whether a group's participation in violence influenced whether it died prior to three years of age. The first model examines only external factors. Since the decision to participate in violence is an internal decision made within the group, the second model examines group violence with internal factors, and the final model examines group violence with all previously significant variables. Table 4 presents the full results.

In the first model, both police intervention and the group's Internet use were significant. In the second model, group participation in violence was negatively related to dying prior to three years. Additionally, both political and religious ideologies were negatively related to dying prior to three years, when youth cultural ideology was the reference category. The final model produced an overall Chi-Square of (73.032), which was significant at the .001 level of significance and produced a Nagelkerke R-Squared of .239. When included in the model with the other significant variables, we found that a group's participation in violence did not significantly influence whether or not a group died prior to three years of age. It appears that an interaction between whether a group has an intervention with the police and its participation in violence is occurring. We ran collinearity diagnostics for these variables and discovered them to be in the acceptable levels.

We replicated this analysis with groups that only survived for more than three years, and the results were similar in that group participation in violence was negatively related to group death. Further, Blomberg et al. and Chermak et al. note that some groups commit only one violent attack, while others commit multiple attacks.<sup>121</sup> To explore this further, we tested an additional violence variable for those groups that survived longer than three years that committed more than one violent attack. The results were similar to those of the regular violence variable.

### **Results of External and Internal Factors on Violent Groups**

Even though group participation in violence was not found to significantly influence whether a group died, groups that participate in violence may be impacted by different external and internal factors than those that do not participate in violence. The first model examines the relationship between all external and internal factors and group death for violent groups that

persisted for longer than three years. Full model results are presented in Table 5. The overall Chi-Square (40.541) was significant at the .001 level of significance. This model produced a Nagelkerke R-squared of .698.

Three variables were found to significantly influence the organizational death of violent groups that persisted for more than three years. Being located in a red state and Internet use both influenced whether or not violent groups died. However, the third variable that was found to significantly influence the organizational death of violent groups was police intervention. Violent groups that experienced police intervention were more likely to die than violent groups that did not have police intervention. This finding was unsurprising. The chances that a group that commits violence would encounter police intervention should be fairly high.

We conducted similar analyses to examine non-violent groups that persisted for more than three years. Table 5 presents these results. The overall Chi-Square (97.017) was significant at the .001 level, and the Nagelkerke R-Squared was .567. Being located in a red state, group size, not using the Internet, and factional splitting were all found to significantly influence the organizational death of non-violent groups. These findings were consistent with Suttmoeller et al.<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, Suttmoeller et al. found group size to significantly influence group death, and we found it to be significant for non-violent groups, but not for violent groups.<sup>123</sup>

We also examined violent and non-violent groups for the full sample of groups. Not using the Internet was the only significant factor in the full sample of violent groups, while not using the Internet and factional splitting were both found to be significant for the full sample of

non-violent groups. These findings were consistent with Suttmoeller et al. that examined the full sample of groups.<sup>124</sup>

## Discussion

This study builds upon Suttmoeller et al. that began to explore possible correlates of organizational death for domestic far-right groups.<sup>125</sup> We examined whether group participation in violence contributed to group longevity. First, we discuss the findings related to our hypotheses, and then discuss several of the findings in more detail. We did not find support for Hypothesis 1 that group participation in violence would be negatively related to group longevity. In fact, we did not find any relationship between group participation in violence and group longevity.

We found support for Hypothesis 2 that external factors will be related to group longevity for violent groups. We found that police intervention, being located in a red state, and not using the Internet were all significant predictors (.05) of organizational longevity for violent groups. Government ideology, while not significant at the .05 level, was significant at the .1 level. Unsurprisingly, police intervention was significant. One would assume that police intervention would influence groups that participate in violence. The red state variable and the government ideology variable both suggest that the external political environment in which the group exists influences its longevity.

Support for Hypothesis 3 is evident in that factional splitting and group size significantly influence organizational longevity of non-violent groups. These results are unsurprising. Prior research frequently discusses the prevalence of factional splitting within terrorist and extremist

groups.<sup>126</sup> Unsurprisingly, groups that suffered from factional splitting would be more likely to die than those that did not. Also, group size is an important variable as well. These results suggest that a larger group is less likely to die.

Several interesting findings deserve further discussion. The first is that *external factors influence the death of violent organizations and internal factors influence the death of non-violent groups*. It is unknown exactly why this occurs. It may be that violent groups are more prone to interacting with their external environment, due to the increased chances of police surveillance and intervention, or public reactions to their violent acts. Since the internal correlates are related to group stability, it is interesting that they did not influence the longevity of violent groups. Cronin suggests that internal group disagreements over the use of violence often leads to group instability.<sup>127</sup> Since the organizational disintegration variable was not significant for the violent groups, the variable suggests that members of groups participating in violent activities usually see violence is an acceptable tactic. If the majority of group members support the use of violence, it may also lead to more violent groups, or at least groups prone to multiple acts of violence. Groups that consist of members who support the use of violence may pose special challenges to police agencies, as simply arresting those who committed the act of violence, may not have a deterrent effect on the other group members if the group consensus is that the use of violence is worth the associated risks.

Similarly, groups that are non-violent may be more internally focused, and are not interacting with their external environment to the extent of the violent groups. If non-violent groups are more internally focused, this may lead to more group stability. If they are more

focused on maintaining the group, through recruitment and other group activities, they may be more adaptable to their external environments and mitigate outside influences, which may influence their longevity. Additionally, non-violent groups would not be attracting police attention to the extent of the violent groups. Future research should definitely explore this finding.

The second finding of interest is that group participation in violence did not influence longevity. Prior research suggests that groups may be more likely to participate in violence once they reach a certain level of organizational capacity.<sup>128</sup> This finding suggests that there may not be any positive or negative consequences to participating in violent activities. However, the relationship is probably more complex than simply stating that group participation in violence does not influence group survival. For example, future research should dig deeper into the interrelation between police intervention and group participation in violence. Interestingly, police intervention was significant with only the external variables and group participation in violence was significant with only the internal variables. When combined in the same model, however, they essentially cancelled each other out and both became insignificant. Collinearity diagnostics determined that there were not any multicollinearity problems between the two variables, so why did it happen? The bigger question may be that if there is not any cost or benefit to the group for participating in violence, then why don't all groups choose to participate in violence? It may be that individual costs associated with violent acts may keep groups from participating in violence, but that is outside the scope of this study. These results suggest that there must be more to this relationship, and that it needs to be disentangled.

One possible way to begin to disentangle this would be to investigate the types of violence in which these groups participated. Our methodology did not distinguish between different types of violence. The type of violence in which a group participates may possibly have some bearing on whether or not the group survives. For example, would it make a difference if a group member committed a mass casualty event, as opposed to a singular attack on a homeless person? Certainly, the public interest and resultant police attention would be much greater for the mass casualty event, but would that influence the research results? It would be very interesting to examine those differences. Going a step further would suggest that maybe there is a difference between those groups that commit a mass casualty event versus those that commit smaller, less public violent acts. Is it a group characteristic, or a leadership characteristic? Even though we found no relationship in this study, this topic should definitely be explored much deeper.

The third is that the results were the same for groups that committed one act of violence and those that committed two or more. We could only explore this variable with groups that survived longer than three years, since none of the groups that survived for less than three years committed multiple acts of violence. One would assume that multiple acts of violence would mean that groups that committed multiple acts would have multiple interactions with the police. Both the types of violence committed and the types and frequency of police interaction would be interesting topics for future research.

The fourth finding of interest is that group size was not a significant predictor of organizational death for violent groups, but it was for non-violent groups. This finding seems to



contradict prior research.<sup>129</sup> It is unknown why group size was not significant for the violent groups. This is another topic that could be further explored in future research.

The final finding of interest is that whether or not a group used the Internet was significant in every model. This variable was significant for both violent and non-violent groups. It is possible, that this single variable may have a much bigger influence on whether a group lives or dies than any other external or internal characteristic. This study used a very basic dichotomous measure of Internet participation. This is definitely a topic that should be explored in future research. How groups use the Internet could provide a wealth of knowledge about a wide variety of group behaviors, in addition to how Internet usage may impact their longevity.

One area that was not addressed by this study is group cohesiveness and its impact on organizational death. We were not able to examine this particular topic in this study, but certainly should be addressed in future research.

Another area that may also have some relevance to this topic is the individual reasons as to why a person joins or quits a group. This study focused on groups only, so this reasoning was outside the scope of this research, but may be a valuable area for future research. For example, does a group's willingness to participate in violence influence individuals to either join or avoid a particular group? Social Identity Theory may prove useful in an inquiry of this type.

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100. A continuous measure of years to death was considered as a dependent variable. However, the requirement that groups exist for three concurrent years post 1990 did not preclude groups from existing for a number of years prior to 1990, as long as they also existed for three concurrent years post 1990. Open source information for the years prior to 1990 was scarce and resulted in large amounts of missing data for several independent variables. For example, no group density information is available prior to 1990. The amount of missing data was so extensive that imputation or substitution methods would not have been appropriate.
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Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Variables*

	All Groups				>3 Years Violent				>3 Years Non-violent			
Variable	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
Poverty Rate	0.036	0.351	0.124	0.050	0.049	0.250	0.125	0.043	0.036	0.325	0.124	0.052
Racial Heterogeneity	0.014	0.710	0.335	0.192	0.014	0.689	0.360	0.221	0.017	0.710	0.334	0.191
Government Ideology	2.170	94.771	49.471	20.035	9.840	91.090	51.947	18.720	2.170	85.180	47.455	19.657
Group Density	0.600	58.000	16.640	10.887	0.600	46.250	16.244	10.813	0.730	58.000	17.476	11.046
	All Groups				<3 Years Violent				< 3 Years Non-violent			
Variable	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
Poverty Rate	0.036	0.351	0.124	0.050	0.057	0.181	0.119	0.030	0.036	0.351	0.125	0.050
Racial Heterogeneity	0.014	0.710	0.335	0.192	0.023	0.677	0.353	0.209	0.017	0.677	0.321	0.175
Government Ideology	2.170	94.771	49.471	20.035	4.500	77.800	46.940	20.391	12.188	94.771	52.591	21.584
Group Density	0.600	58.000	16.640	10.887	2.000	52.000	16.219	12.560	1.000	52.000	15.390	10.666

Table 2 *Descriptives for External Characteristics*

Variable	All Groups	> 3 Years Violent	> 3 Years Non-Violent	< 3 Years Violent	< 3 Years Non-Violent
<i>Urban</i>					
Non-Urban Group	19.60%	19.30%	20.00%	13.30%	21.90%
Urban Group	80.40%	80.70%	80.00%	86.70%	78.10%
<i>Police Intervention</i>					
No Police Intervention	74.40%	16.40%	85.80%	18.80%	89.00%
Police Intervention	25.60%	83.60%	14.20%	81.30%	11.00%
<i>Lost Public Support</i>					
No Change in Support Level	97.50%	98.40%	97.20%	100.00%	97.20%
Lost Public Support	2.50%	1.60%	2.80%	0.00%	2.80%
<i>Presidential Election Results</i>					
Blue State	56.80%	36.20%	27.60%	68.80%	54.10%
Red State	43.20%	19.00%	31.40%	31.30%	45.90%
Purple State		44.80%	41.00%		
<i>Use of the Internet</i>					
Used the Internet	42.30%	53.20%	55.90%	6.30%	17.40%
Did not Use the Internet	57.70%	46.80%	44.10%	93.80%	82.60%

Table 3 *Descriptives for Internal Characteristics*

Variable	All Groups	> 3 Years Violent	> 3 Years Non-Violent	< 3 Years Violent	< 3 Years Non-Violent
<i>Factional Splitting</i>					
Factional Splitting	8.60%	16.70%	8.20%	13.30%	4.90%
No Factional Splitting	91.40%	83.30%	91.80%	86.70%	95.10%
<i>Group Ideology</i>					
Political Group	50.70%	36.70%	58.20%	18.80%	48.60%
Religious Group	16.00%	11.75%	21.10%	0.00%	10.30%
Youth Cultural Group	33.30%	51.70%	20.70%	81.30%	41.10%
<i>Lost Group Members</i>					
Did not Lose Group Members	85.10%	43.40%	95.20%	43.80%	95.40%
Lost Group Members	14.90%	56.70%	4.80%	56.30%	4.60%
<i>Violent</i>					
Non-Violent	80.40%				
Violent	19.60%				

Table 4 *Violence and Organizational Death All Groups*

	External			Internal <sup>c</sup>			All Significant		
Variable	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
Urban	0.107	0.771	1.113						
Poverty Rate	-0.447	0.870	0.640						
Racial Heterogeneity	-0.158	0.849	0.854						
Government Ideology	0.007	0.265	1.007						
Group Density	-0.001	0.904	0.999						
Police Intervention	-0.752	0.008*	0.472				-0.606	0.110	0.546
Blue State <sup>a</sup>	0.272	0.281	0.762						
Did not use Internet	1.924	.000**	6.849				1.748	.000**	5.744
Group Violent				-1.042	.013**	0.353	-0.540	0.222	0.582
Political Ideology <sup>b</sup>				-1.136	.000***	0.321	-0.578	.033*	0.561
Religious Ideology <sup>b</sup>				-1.712	.000***	0.181	-1.166	.005*	0.312
Factional Splitting				-0.333	0.478	0.717			
Lost Group Members				-0.380	0.412	0.684			
Constant	-1.921	.001**	0.146	0.375	0.106	1.454	-1.250	.000**	0.286
Chi-Square	68.693	.000**		34.314	.000***		73.032	.000**	
Nagelkerke R-Squared		0.223		0.128			0.239		
<sup>a</sup> Only blue and red states included in this analysis. No < 3 yr groups existed in a purple state.									
<sup>b</sup> Youth Cultural Ideology reference category									
<sup>c</sup> Group Size not included due to lack of variation in < 3yr groups									

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p<.05

\*\*\*  
p<.001

Table 5 *External and Internal Factors for Violent and Non-Violent Groups*

	<b>Violent</b>				<b>Non-Violent</b>			
<b>Variables</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>S.E</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Urban	-1.213	2.530	0.632	0.297	-0.954	0.678	0.159	0.385
Poverty Rate	-5.709	21.194	0.788	0.003	-1.300	4.976	0.794	0.272
Racial Heterogeneity	0.240	4.185	0.954	1.271	0.659	1.489	0.658	1.933
Government Ideology	0.103	0.059	0.082 <sup>*</sup>	1.108	0.012	0.013	0.338	1.012
Group Density	0.065	0.058	0.262	1.067	0.009	0.021	0.684	1.009
Police Intervention	6.530	2.961	0.027 <sup>**</sup>	685.646	0.332	0.703	0.637	1.394
Blue State <sup>a</sup>	1.174	1.256	0.350	3.236	0.635	0.592	0.284	1.887
Red State <sup>a</sup>	6.926	2.803	0.013 <sup>**</sup>	1018.091	1.332	0.550	0.015 <sup>**</sup>	3.787
Did not use Internet	3.037	1.470	0.039 <sup>**</sup>	20.834	3.488	0.598	0.000 <sup>***</sup>	32.734
Factional Splitting	2.484	2.039	0.223	11.993	2.137	0.997	0.032 <sup>**</sup>	8.473
Group Size	1.112	1.208	0.357	3.040	2.871	0.913	0.002 <sup>**</sup>	17.655
Political Ideology <sup>b</sup>	2.810	1.741	0.107	16.610	0.230	0.662	0.728	1.259
Religious Ideology <sup>b</sup>	6.392	3.431	0.062 <sup>*</sup>	596.941	-0.200	0.751	0.790	0.819
Lost Group Members	-0.944	1.155	0.414	0.389	-1.075	1.378	0.435	0.341
Constant	-							
	16.546	7.755	0.033 <sup>**</sup>	0.000	-4.235	1.436	0.003 <sup>**</sup>	0.014
Model Chi-Square	40.541		0.000 <sup>***</sup>		97.017		0.000 <sup>***</sup>	
Nagelkerke R-Squared	0.698				0.567			
<sup>a</sup> Purple State reference group								
<sup>b</sup> Youth Cultural Ideology as reference group								

<sup>\*</sup>p<.1

<sup>\*\*</sup>p<.05

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>p<.001